

# Fortnightly Sermon

By  
JAMES VILA BLAKE

Minister Third Unitarian Church  
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## DOING AND KNOWING.

### III

"If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching."  
John vii, 17.

In two foregoing sermons I have spoken from this deep saying of the Master.

In the first discourse I spoke of the easiness of religious emotion, and, contrariwise, the hard exercise of daily goodness of life; consequently, the dangers and delusions of emotion unless "encamped about" with moral vigor and action.

In the second discourse I spoke of the diminishing and vanishing of emotions, if they be repeated often, by reason of the law of our nature that passive affections fade under frequent recurrence of them, while active exercise of will settles into strength by repetition of it, and becomes a habit of power; consequently, the impossibility of maintaining emotions, religious or other, in strength and beauty, without an attendant action of will putting them forth into service and virtue.

I will go on now, in this sermon, to a third force or depth in the Master's saying.

The great truth is that it is by goodness of act that we shall have abundant and clear knowledge. Or say it thus, To do rightly is the way to know correctly. Or in these words, To see things as truly they are, comes by moral virtue more than by force of intellect. Or again thus, Nobleness of life in the soul is the condition of wide scope of understanding. Or thus, True knowledge is an ethical achievement, not intellectual. Or, best of all, as Jesus put it simply, "He that wills to do His will shall know"; and elsewhere, "The pure in heart shall see God."

This deep truth rests on the principle that we can know only



those things which we are like unto, and can have understanding only of what we share in our own nature. If a man have a small measure of harmony in him, then can he know but that little of music; and if he have so small portion as not even to perceive any sounds, but is deaf, then he can know naught of music. So of light, and of all things that pertain to the senses. Likewise equally of love and truth and beauty and thankfulness, and all things that pertain to the spirit. Only if *we* be loving shall we see love in Nature and among men. In like manner we must be like God in order to know the things that come of God. But all things come of God, all things have their place and power and subjection and permission in his Providence, all things are made in his Life, Presence and Overruling, "and without him was nothing made that was made." Therefore if we must be like God in order to understand the things that come of God, we must be like him in order to understand anything and know anything as truly it is.

Goodness, justice, truthfulness, devotion, sincerity, self-control, faithfulness, honesty, righteousness,—I will gather all these into one term, namely, *ideality*. By ideality I mean the pursuit of high things, the good, the beautiful and the true, *without thought of reward*. For if you will look at each of these virtues, you will see that it cannot exist at all except purely and without mixture of anything with it. If justice be done for a reward, it is not justice but craft; if one tell the truth for an advantage, then the truth-telling is not truthfulness, but a barter; if one be devoted to a person or cause for guerdon, it is not devotion but shrewdness; if one be sincere for an end, it is not sincerity but subtlety; if one be honest for policy, it is not honesty but strategy. So that it is plain that all these virtues are but the many forms of purity of heart, and will bear to be naught else; but with any mixture they cease to be. Divine singleness of nature is common to them all, and is the being of them. Therefore I may gather all these virtues, as I have said, under one name, which is ideality; because ideality is the following after spiritual things without thought of any other reward by them, or for anything but their own grace and divinity.

Now, let us suppose the Universe to be framed on this

ideality, and builded on it; suppose creation to come forth from virtue, from pure and simple holiness, as itself the one life and reward, the source, aim, end and recompense in one, all else merely secondary and by the way, and not much to be labored for by the way, and the ideal never to be given up for anything because holiness in itself is divine, and enough, and all; so that if there be pains and privations fallen on the good, 'tis no overthrow of faith or of courage, because to be good is the supreme reward of the good, and having this crown we can "both hope and quietly wait"; suppose this to be so, and that Creation so hath come forth and so is builded, how can this be seen, known and felt by one who has not that ideality, but is seeking the rewards, and doing right only for what may come of it to him?

Now, such truly is the Universe. And who can tell what a stranger in a strange land the seeker of rewards must be? He is homeless, not because he is away from his home, but because no place is his home. For it is not this or that place which is strange to him, but all the creation of God is to him a strange country, being made and framed in one manner and he in another manner all contrary to it; creation a breaking forth from the Supreme, Perfect, Ideal, Holy, for the unfolding of itself in beauty; and he no more than a runner after rewards, a seeker after gains.

Surely, now, it is plain that any one whose aims are low, selfish, individual, who in every act is thinking what payment he shall make out of it or what advantage it shall become to him, can not understand truly a universe framed so differently, and in a way that so is opposed to him and against him. He will not judge well; he will not see things as truly they are and in their real order; because he is not like them, but made as if of another creation that has no part in this one. It is certain that he must be ignorant. If he pile up all arts, letters, learning, still he will be ignorant. If he amass all sciences and philosophies, still he will be ignorant. If he know all affairs, powers, principalities, revenues, commerce, governments, still he will be ignorant. For he will know all things only as they appear to him, and they will seem to him to be dispensers of rewards and servants of advantage. He cannot see them as truly they are, because they are singing and praising and serving goodness,



beauty and truth for the pure divinity of them. I say that one can not understand the whirling of the spheres, their dance before the Lord, who knows not "that gravitation is identical with purity of heart." In a good universe it is only the good man that can have knowledge of it, and see truly how the parts and members in it agree, and mingle, and act one on another, and act all together. The bad man could be wise and knowing, and see things as truly they were, only in a bad universe, like to himself. Only the soul that loves the truth devoutly and for itself, and will not sell it, but cleaves to it and bears witness to it, though it "find him poor at first and keep him so;" that can find a joy in high thoughts, spiritual visions, great humane hopes; that can sacrifice and meet loss for such things; that lives with ideality, believes in the might of simple truth and beauty, and asks not to be rewarded but purely rejoices to adore and to serve,—only this soul can know well the things and laws and powers of this universe which is of God. This is the Master's saying, that 'tis he who wills to do the will of God that shall know of the teaching.

Now if a man live not with high thoughts for their own sake, not with the idealities of things, but with questions of advantage to himself, judging things not by their nature, ideally, but by the praise or fashion of the time, or by what gain or repute he can make of them, I say he will be ignorant of the truth of things. This he must be, because creation is framed not so, but builded all contrary to him, on the eternal divinity of the good, the beautiful and the true. Thereupon his ignorance will have effect in two ways:

First, he will misjudge the individual things and persons which come in his way and encompass him. He will not know what simplicity is, but call it somewhat else, perhaps dulness or folly or affectation. If there be a noble cause struggling against apathy, ease, caste, he will not know it to be noble, but call it infatuate or seditious. He will not know devotion, self-sacrifice, singleness of motive if he meet it, but will conceive some current of self-interest or plots under the surface and will go far astray looking for them. He will not know the goodness of any good thing that not yet has grown strong to drag a large company after it. Thus he will miss the best things because he

will not know them, and continually will misjudge and cry "crucify" where he ought to trust and love.

Secondly, he will know naught of Providence. May not such ignorance as now I speak of, be one great reason of unrest and faultfinding with Providence. I hear very much said about the problems of life because of the inequalities of it. Some are so rich and some so poor; and many are rich with little work, and many are poor though they labor hard. Some persons have lives of rich rewards and honey-dew to the end; some begin in hardship or loneliness and never straighten the back from its burden till they and their loads fall together. "The distribution of the good things of life," it is said, is all awry, unequal, inconsiderate, sorrowful and painful.

Now who can deny that there are injustices, puzzling oppressions, hard conditions, wrongs, which we are to work at and set right? But, to the idealist, are these things *problems of Providence*? Are the present distributions of rewards to be cast as reproaches on the holy order of Creation? Blots on the love of God? Who can think such a thing, if he live in the plane of the ideal? For in this plane, what are rewards? They are but the things by the way, which *we* must learn to undertake and do wisely withal, and spread abroad justly and kindly. But they are not the offices and recompense of God, neither to be considered in the divine endowment of us; for goodness and truth and beauty are their own recompense, and they admit not any taint of any reward for them, or any other glory and greatness beside themselves. Therefore what if the distribution of pleasant things be yet deficient and unequal on this earth? What has this to do with holy Providence? Let *us* look to it, becoming just and loving, and learning better to equalize conditions. But in the presence and love of God, there is no apportioning of rewards unto the good, the beautiful and the true; but the recompense of beauty is the greatness of the beauty thereof, and of goodness the goodness, and of truth the truth, and the power of them to confer knowledge and to enlighten the eyes to see things as truly they are, and therein to see God. Therefore it is only one, I think, who squanders and wrecks his soul upon rewards, that will complain of Providence. Says a high and solemn teacher:

"The life of the called is not a happy life, if happiness con-



sists in selfish enjoyment; nevertheless it is a blessed life, if blessedness consists in consciously filling a place in the army of the faithful, and the fellowship of that spirit which animates all the brave and good. The limits of enjoyment are soon reached, the season of enjoyment is soon past; but life and blessedness have no bounds. The time is near when the having possessed a little more or a little less of this world's goods, the having experienced a little more or a little less of earthly delights, will be no longer matter of pleasure or regret. But the consciousness of having paid with our best for values received, of having borne our share of the common burden, and contributed something to the general good, will be rich compensation in view of all the past, and ample support in view of all the future; will be a satisfaction which we can take with us to our final rest, assured that the sundering of soul and body cannot wrest this treasure from our life, and that wherever in the Divine economy our waking may be, it will find us sound and furnished and girt and ready for the new career.”\*

So far I have spoken of the holiness of God. Now also we have the love of God to think of. This too we must be like, if we will know the things that come of him.

God is not and lives not for himself, but to give himself. Deeply and well sang the ancient poet. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” *In the beginning.* He could not be *alone*. In the beginning it was so; from eternity it was so. Not for himself or with himself or alone could he be, but for the bringing forth of creation and his creatures, for joy and goodness to them, and perfecting of them. This is love.

Now, if in truth the Universe be framed on this nature and purpose; if verily creation come forth from this virtue and be builded on this nature and accord in all things with this purpose, of living not for oneself but for others, and each for all in love; if indeed this be so, how then is it possible that one who is selfish and unloving can know the things of creation as truly they are?

Now, such truly is the Universe, a creation of love, eternal love, almighty and inevitable love. And who can tell what a stranger in a strange land the unloving and selfish person must be? He must

\*Dr. Frederick H. Hedge, in “Sermons.”



be ignorant, like a man cast on a foreign shore or dropped through the sky from one world to another where even the structure of the body and the parts and gestures are unlike to his own. If he collect all knowledges, arts, influences, strategies, still he will be ignorant. If he be skilled in all tools, instruments, computations, still he will be ignorant. No matter what learning or cunning of head or hand he has, lacking love and void of the devotion of himself unto others, he will be ignorant, he can not know the nature of the things that are about him. In Paul's great song-chapter, 'tis so he exalts the wisdom which is love,—“If I speak with tongues of men and of angels, and if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” In the Universe of Him who could not be alone, whose name is Love, the creation builded in the image of service and of devotion, of the affectionate going forth of one member unto another and of God unto all, the man whose look is turned on himself in most, unloving unto others, is unlike to the frame of creation, and he can not know it. Only the soul which is a wide and tender fellowship, which hath a great love for men, which is moved by the sight of the creatures of the earth, which turns unto others with benefits and consolation, and gives not of substance only but itself, which rejoices deeply in all welfare of men and creatures and labors for it, to spare pain and make joy,—only this soul can know well the things and laws and powers of this Universe of love, which is of God who could not be alone. This is the Master's saying, that 'tis he who wills to do the will of God that shall know of the teaching.

Now, if a man be turned only to himself, unloving, selfish, not thinking of others' good, to spend himself for them, but of his own advantage, to save himself for himself, and thus he be ignorant of the truth of things, as he must be, because creation is framed not so, but all contrary to him, then, as before we observed in the man whose soul is bent and bowed down to rewards, his ignorance will have effect in two ways:

First, he will not know the individual things and creatures which come in his way; he will not conceive their nature as it is.

The good and sweet things of life and earth are rolling forth

continually, like clouds from a full-dewy air. Sleep and waking, the "fiery oes" of night, the blue and silver sky of day and the opening of the door of the furnace of the sun, strength of limb, deep inhalations, quick senses and the foods of them, delicious sounds of water—rain, brook, sea—of æolian murmurs over tree-tops, of carolings of airy feathered throats, the "hum of bees" and noon-tide drone of insects, "the lowing herd," the halloo of children, the music of pipes and song; lovely sights and scenes, land vistas, water vistas, mountains, colors, shadows, fair outlines, graceful shapes, pictures, splendors of light and of contrast; comforts and good pleasures of body, shelter, fire, lavatories, tables, grains all wholesome and delicate, fruits of radiant bloom and vivacious juices, wine and oil and milk and honey,—all these roll forth and come to us unceasingly. But who can know them, being unloving? For these are God's love. One is ignorant of them who is turned unto himself, for these are God's turning of himself unto all creatures. How should he who is unloving and turned unto himself know truly, as they are, the things which are the eternal effluence of love? He can not. He will not see their nature nor hear their language, nor know how they agree and work together, nor how they relate unto his own body and soul; nor will he awake to the thanksgiving which belongs with them; because he is unloving unto others and thinking of himself.

But not only these good and delicious things of earth, but also admirable creatures and beautiful persons surround him, like a rich company in a garden. Among them good deeds and kind affections go back and forth like carrier doves, and even they are offered unto him. But he will not know love when he beholds it. He can not. He has not the figure of it in himself. He will not know it, but call it somewhat else, perhaps self-interest or fatuity or fond folly. Therefore the nature and exaltation of persons will pass him by unknown; because, though he have wit like Jove, he has not heart as a child. He will not know life as truly it is, nor the hearts of men as they are.

Secondly, he will know naught of Providence. For consider. Amid all the strains and clamors of life, the pains, losses, wishes, inequalities of which before I spoke, a very vast portion of Providence turns on the supports and joys of human love. This



element is so great that it overturns all appearances, and cries out to us to move cautiously in judgment. For no gilding or fine hangings show where the true riches are; but in a palace there may be the most wretched poverty with groanings that can not be uttered, and in the small hut a most rich content, an affluence of life; because love is not in the mansion, but is in the bare little dwelling. Let anxieties and labors, privations and small portions, humble estate and poverty, pelt as they may, and pile like hail stones where they have fallen, and yet all these may be overborne, and made as but manly trials, and lightened till their weight has fled into the sky, by love and a dear companionship and precious sharing together of souls that are one. Therefore who can say how ignorant of Providence and how little knowing of the resources and ways of God with human hearts is the man who has not love in himself, nor knows in himself the sweetness of turning devoutly unto another in love, nor that other sweetness of being turned unto with trust and love? He can not know the things of the Providence of God. The light of the ways of God with men must be darkness unto him; because he is blinded to the vast sum of joys and the supports of soul which arise in the love of men. This is the Master's saying, that 'tis he who wills to do the will of God that shall know the teaching; or thus, 'Tis only he that hath become like unto God, and so far as he is like, that shall know the ways of God. This is another deep and great meaning in this deep saying of the Master.

Is it any wonder that Providence so much is complained of among men and such reproach thrown on the love of God? For how can his ways be seen or creation be known as truly it is, by one who is bent and bowed unto rewards, seeing that creation rests on pure beauty and goodness for themselves; or by one who is unloving and turned all to himself, seeing that creation is effluent from love and is the turning of God unto all creatures and the coming forth of creatures for him who could not be alone?

An old writer says that we may have an ear for music "without being able to perform in any kind, we may judge well of poetry, without being poets" to write it; but we can have no notion of goodness without being good.



